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WORLD CONFERENCE ON FAITH
AND ORDER

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

ON

THE UNITY OF CHRISTENDOM
AND THE RELATION THERETO OF
EXISTING CHURCHES

BASED ON REPORT VII OF THE
LAUSANNE CONFERENCE OF 1927

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FOREWORD.

The Faith and Order Movement is a concerted attempt to promote the cause of Christian unity by means of conference. It starts from two convictions, (1) that the desire for unity needs to be quickened by the recognition and reaffirmation of those beliefs which Christians already possess in common; (2) that the paths to unity cannot be found unless members of the severed Christian communions come together in order to understand each other, and to examine anew those differences of principle and practice which now divide them. It has therefore invited the Christian world to *consider* the things in which we agree and those in which we differ.

At Lausanne in 1927 we set out upon this path of mutual understanding, and made some advance along it. The next step must be taken, not by five hundred people in a conference, but by the rank and file of the Churches. It is time that they began to *consider*, with the desire to *understand*. Experience proves that real reunion does not come within the horizon of possibility until the rank and file desire it, *knowing why*.

The Lausanne Conference confronted seven great subjects, and issued seven Reports which embody the main agreements and disagreements of its members upon them. Six of these were received by the Conference as a whole. The seventh was referred to the Continuation Committee for further consideration, with the understanding that the Committee "would take such action as it considered advisable in view of the knowledge it had of the situation." Acting under these instructions the Continuation Committee through a subcommittee prepared a revised draft of Report VII which they submitted to the Churches with the other six reports "for such consideration as they might desire to give it."

Report VII differs from the other six reports in that it focuses attention upon the issues that are immediately before the Churches, and considers these with reference to their bearing upon possible action. But like the other reports, it considers them solely "as matters of study and discussion" with a view to bringing into light the true nature of the difficulties which lie

in the way, and hence making possible more intelligent action, when and if the time for action shall come.

As an illustration of the kind of questions that need fuller consideration, and as a help to those groups who may desire to carry discussion further, a few examples of questions needing discussion are prefixed to the text of the Report. Other questions will no doubt seem to others equally or more important.

Criticisms of the questions, suggestions of further topics, and reports of group-discussions will be welcomed by the Committee, and should be addressed to the Secretariat, P. O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

QUESTIONS ON
THE UNITY OF CHRISTENDOM
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OF EXISTING CHURCHES

(Report VII, pp. 8-13)

1. What is the nature of the corporate unity at which we should aim? In particular, what is the relation of organic to federal unity? What different forms may federal unity take? How far and in what ways may any of these forms be (a) a substitute for organic unity, (b) a step toward organic unity, (c) a form of organic unity, (d) a supplement to partial organic unity?
2. How far is it possible to include within the one Church types of religious faith and worship as diverse as are represented by the Friends and the Anglo-Catholics? What more can be done than is now being done to interpret to one another the position of those who take a high sacramental view of religion and those who regard such a view as erroneous and vice versa? What help towards such better understanding could be given by a more intensive study of worship as distinct from faith and order?
3. Where apparently irreconcilable differences exist, what method of procedure offers the best hope of progress? How far and in what ways is it possible to supplement discussion by experiment? If the method of experiment is impracticable, is any alternative possible?
4. Pending complete organic union, how far and in what way is it possible to express the existing degree of spiritual unity among Christians in corporate acts of worship, witness and work?

What are the reasons for or against

- (a) in worship — a joint celebration of the Holy Communion on special occasions and under certain safeguards, or, a simultaneous celebration in different groups or places?
 - (b) in witness — joint evangelistic services on the basis of the Lausanne Report on the Message of the Church?
 - (c) in work — practical coöperation in social and moral questions along the lines of the various Commissions of the Stockholm Conference on Life and Work?
5. Is the suggestion made by the Ecumenical Patriarch "that a League or Council of the Churches should be formed for practical purposes," practicable or not? If so, under what conditions?

FOREWORD TO THE REPORT ON SUBJECT VII.

The report of Section VII, on the Unity of Christendom and the relation thereto of existing Churches, was presented to the Conference on August 18, 1927, by the Chairman of the section, the Archbishop of Upsala, and after discussion, in which various amendments were proposed, "was referred to the Drafting Committee for the consideration of the proposed amendments." The text of the first draft, together with an abstract of the discussion, is found in the official Proceedings of the Conference ("Faith and Order"), pages 396-403.

In the absence of the Archbishop of Upsala, a revision of the Report was presented to the full Conference on Saturday, August 20, by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Vice-Chairman of the Section. After debate, in which it appeared that the revision would not receive the unanimous approval of the Conference, the President suggested as a proposal likely to meet all difficulties "that the Report should be received by the Conference in the same way as the other reports, but on the understanding that it should be referred to the Continuation Committee for further consideration," it being further explained "that the Continuation Committee would take such action as it considered advisable in view of the knowledge it had of the situation." This proposal was adopted by the Conference. The text of the revised report, together with a brief abstract of the discussion which followed, is found in the Proceedings of the Conference, pages 435-439.

At a meeting of the Continuation Committee held on August 20, 1927, the following action was taken:

With reference to the report on Subject VII which had been received by the World Conference on Faith and Order for transmission to the Continuation Committee, it was agreed that a committee be appointed with the duty of considering the whole situation with regard to Subject VII and reporting back to the Business Committee. The following were named:

Rt. Rev. the Bishop of Gloucester, Convener
Rev. William Adams Brown, D.D.
Rt. Rev. James DeWolf Perry, D.D.
Gen.-Sup. D.Dr. Otto Dibelius
Rev. Timothy Tingfang Lew, Ph.D.

At the suggestion of the President of the Conference, the Archbishop of Upsala was afterwards added to the Committee.

Acting under the instructions thus given, the Committee prepared a revised draft of Report VII in which, without introducing any new matter of their own, they endeavored to meet the criticisms which had been made of the Report in its earlier forms by rearrangement of material, by more exact reference to previous actions of the Conference itself, and by following more consistently the precedent set in earlier reports of stating alternative positions where there was difference of view.

In the course of its deliberations the Committee received valuable suggestions from many members of the Conference, especially from the Archbishop of Armagh, Professor Merle d'Aubigné, and Archbishop Germanos. The latter contributed valuable notes on the attitude of the Orthodox Church to certain points raised in the Report.

The Report, thus amended and revised, was presented to the Business Committee on December 21, 1927, and after full consideration and the adoption of certain minor amendments is by them submitted to the churches for such consideration as they may desire to give it.

REPORT ON SUBJECT VII
THE UNITY OF CHRISTENDOM
AND THE RELATION THERETO OF EXISTING
CHURCHES

Reports II to VI register the degree of unity in the conception of the Church to which the Conference has thus far attained. It remains in this closing report to consider the consequences which follow for the existing churches.

I

Report II declares that "the message of the Church to the world is and must always remain the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . . the joyful message of redemption, both here and hereafter, the gift of God to sinful man in Jesus Christ."

Report III declares that "God who has given us the Gospel for the salvation of the world has appointed His Church to witness by life and word to its redeeming power . . . As there is but one Christ, and one life in Him, and one Holy Spirit who guides into all truth, so there is and can be but one Church, holy, catholic, and apostolic."

Report IV declares that "notwithstanding the differences in doctrine among us, we are united in a common Christian Faith which is proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures and is witnessed to and safeguarded in the Ecumenical Creed, commonly called the Nicene, and in the Apostles' Creed, which Faith is continually confirmed in the spiritual experience of the Church of Christ."

Report V declares that "the ministry is a gift of God through Christ to His Church and is essential to the being and well-being of the Church . . . The purpose of the ministry is to impart to men the saving and sanctifying benefits of Christ through pastoral service, the preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the sacraments, to be made effective by faith."

Report VI declares that "Sacraments are of divine appointment and that the Church ought thankfully to observe them as divine gifts;" that they "have special reference to the corporate life and fellowship of the Church and that the grace is conveyed by the Holy Spirit, taking of the things of Christ and applying them to the soul through faith."

II

The unity of the Church implies a unity in Faith and Order, but it does not mean uniformity. There must be space for divers types of expression, provided that those things which safeguard the unity in essentials are maintained. The various communions should bring into the common life of the Church those elements which express their characteristic gifts, so that nothing of the rich variety which marks Christian experience will be lost, and the liberty of interpretation within the limits of the accepted faith will be preserved.

Further there are differences as to the ultimate form which it is God's will His Church should take. Some hold that this form "was determined by Christ Himself and is therefore unchangeable; others that the one Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit may express itself in varying forms" (Report III), and therefore make place in their view of the Church of the future for diversity of doctrine, worship and order. Still others admit diversity of worship and order, but not of doctrine.

This difference of ideal affects the view taken of the steps through which the ideal is to be reached, some interpreting the limit of legitimate variation in doctrinal statement and in the administration of church ordinances more strictly than others; but there is widespread agreement that there must be some unity of faith and practice and some liberty of interpretation as to the nature of sacramental grace and of ministerial order and authority. (See the appended "Note to Section II.")

III

As the individual disciple is known by his fruits, so the unity of the disciples is shown by their fellowship in the service of the Master. Report V declares that, "pending the solution of the questions of faith and order in which agreements have not yet been reached, it is possible for us, not simply as individuals but as Churches, to unite in the activities of brotherly service which Christ has committed to His disciples;" but there is difference as to the exact form this coöperation should take.

In his Encyclical Letter of 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarch proposed "that a league or council of the churches should be formed for practical purposes." It has been suggested that such a council might be evolved from already existing organizations, such as the Continuation Committee on Life and Work, consisting of representatives officially appointed by almost all the Christian

communions, and other organizations of similar nature. Some of us believe that such a council if formed should include, as its two branches, questions of life and work and of faith and order. Others believe that, for the present, it would be wiser for the movements represented by Stockholm and Lausanne to develop in independence, each following its own way; but there is general agreement that ultimately life, work, faith and order are expressions of an existing spiritual unity, and that each requires the other for its complete fruition. "We therefore commend to our Churches the consideration of the steps which may be immediately practicable to bring our existing unity in service to more effective expression" (Report V).

IV

As material for such consideration, the following suggestions which it was impossible adequately to discuss at Lausanne are passed on to the churches:

1. In preparation for closer fellowship, each communion should seek more intimate knowledge of the faith and life, worship and order of the others. Differences which are the outgrowth of complicated historical developments, may preserve some aspect of truth or of life which is of value to the church as a whole, or they may sometimes prove to be less important than they are supposed to be. As the different communions come to know one another better, they will grow in understanding and in appreciation of one another.

2. It has not been possible for the Conference to consider with the care which it deserves the relation of the existing churches to one another or the place which each or any of them may hold in the undivided church. We commend to the churches the suggestions which have been made on this subject in the addresses delivered at the Conference. In the meantime, we welcome the movement already under way for the union of bodies of similar doctrine, polity and worship, and trust that it may continue with ever greater success.

3. Pending the complete, organic union of the different churches, we note with satisfaction a number of movements for practical coöperation along social, evangelistic and other lines. Experience shows that it has been possible for widely separate bodies to coöperate in such movements with mutual profit and without surrender of principle. (See the appended "Notes to Section IV," Note A.) There is abundant evi-

dence that when communions undertake together the divine task of bringing the love of Christ to those who do not know Him, they become closer to one another. Especially we commend to the churches the consideration of what steps can be taken to eliminate needless overlapping and competition in the local community; that in ways consistent with the genius of the several communions, our existing unity in Christ may be manifest to the world. (See the appended "Notes to Section IV," Note B.)

V

We note with gratitude to God the recent increase of effective coöperation in the mission field. The purpose of all missionary work is to carry the eternal Gospel to the ends of the earth, so that it may meet the spiritual needs of every nation and bring all men to the Saviour. Here more than anywhere else unity is essential. We note with sympathy the degree of union which has already been attained in many countries and the plans which are proposed for further union. We commend these plans to the churches for their careful consideration.

The demand which comes from the churches of the Mission field is that the Churches at home should grant them greater freedom of action, and that their hopes of unity should not be frustrated by the long-continued acquiescence in disunion at home which makes it difficult to recognize how fatal disunion is to the new indigenous churches.

VI

Complete fellowship in the Church will be realized only when the way is opened for all God's children to join in communion at the Lord's table. Through prayer and thoughtful deliberation the steps must be found which will most effectively lead to this goal. Ambiguous statements and hasty measures may hinder rather than hasten the work of unification. Yet if we are ever to become one, we must not shrink from the task. Some of us believe that full communion can be reached only at the end of the process of unification; others that it may be used by God as the means to that end. Whatever the way to the goal, complete unity will require that the Churches be so transformed that there may be full recognition of one another by members of all communions.

Nothing will do more to hasten the union for which we all long than that in our daily prayer, both as individuals and as churches, we should remember one another. It has been suggested that

a common prayer be sent out in the name of the Conference to be used at a convenient time by all Christian Churches. Especially would we bear on our hearts before God our brethren who are passing through suffering, praying that grace may be given to them to stand firm under their afflictions, and that to them and to us alike, God will grant the spirit of sacrifice as we remember the word of the Lord Jesus: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." God give us, both as individuals and as churches, wisdom and courage to do His will.

NOTE TO SECTION II

It must be noted that representatives of the Orthodox Church would guard their acceptance of any diversity in matters of Faith and Order (Section II) by the following limitations.

- (a) The types of expression so far as these types have been established by Ecumenical Synods must be maintained.
- (b) Liberty of interpretation comes within the sphere of the Church as a whole and not of different sections or individuals.
- (c) They cannot agree that "there must be some liberty of interpretation as to the nature of sacramental grace, and of ministerial order and authority."
- (d) They admit differences in worship so long as they do not diverge from the common doctrinal basis, on which is based the Holy Worship as handed down from the times of the Apostles.

NOTES TO SECTION IV, PAR. 3

A. There are some who believe that coöperation should take the form of federation, either local, national, or international: others oppose federation, fearing that it may become a substitute for complete organic union. In the interest of clarity of thought it is important to remember that the word "federation" is used in at least three different senses. It may denote either

1. A substitute for organic union.
2. A step on the road to organic union.
3. A form of organic union.

In discussing federation it is important to make clear in which of these different senses the word is used.

B. It is suggested that in the case of communions of similar doctrine and polity, the desired expression of unity may often be secured by the method of denominational comity. In the case of those communions which are separated by fundamental differences of view, the problem is more difficult and will require special consideration.

Publications about the World Conference on Faith and Order may be had without charge from the Secretariat. Please send the names and addresses of any persons who might be interested in the movement.

Pamphlet No. 61 contains questions upon Reports III, V and VI of the Lausanne Conference — on the Nature of the Church, the Church's Ministry, and the Sacraments.